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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

of

LYNH NGUYEN

for

DATA SOURCE INTERFACE ENHANCED ERROR RECOVERY

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7, 2000 for LIVE CONNECTION ENHANCEMENT FOR DATA SOURCE

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5 batch files, or embedded in host languages such as C and COBOL. SQL has evolved into
a standard language for RDBMS software and has been adopted as such by both the
American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the International Standards
Organization (ISO).

10 A common application for databases relates to their interaction with Internet web
browsers. A remote application such as a web browser may be used to query data from a
data base. The data may then be used to create a table or other display of information on
the web browser. This requires the transfer of data files and the formatting of data on the
web browser. As the database is responsive to SQL and a web browser requires an
HTML format, an interface module is required to enable interaction between the web
15 browser and the database. One example of such an interface module is Net.Data
available from IBM Corp., Armonk, New York.

Net.Data enables Internet and Intranet access to relational data on a variety of
platforms. Net.Data incorporates a macrolanguage which supports both HTML and SQL
and allows for interaction with universal web browsers and relational database systems.
20 Net.Data operates in conjunction with a web server interface and supports client-side
processing as well as server-side processing with languages such as Java, REXX, Perl and
C++. Net.Data provides database connectivity to a variety of data sources including
information stored in relational databases, flat files Java files, Perl files and the like.

Net.Data may support a variety of operating systems, including OS/2, AIX,
25 Windows NT, HP-UX, Solaris, SCO, OS/390 and OS/400. Net.Data is further able to

5 cache web pages to improve application performance, particularly when repeated requests are made for the same web page. Although this invention is compatible for use with an interface module such as Net.Data, other common gateway interface applications may be used with the present invention as well.

10 The interface module, which may be resident on a server, receives a query from a web browser, formats the query into SQL, and interacts with the database to receive data and create the table or other display of information. The interface module then uses its macrolanguage to present the data to the web browser in HTML format. The web browser, in turn, displays the data to a user of the remote application. In this manner, the interface module serves as an Internet gateway for accessing a database. However, every 15 time the interface module connects to the database, requests a connection set up for the database, or sends a query to get data results from the data base, the interface must perform a set of time-consuming processes such as initialization, authorization, password confirmation, and the like. These processes can be time consuming, slowing down the entire system and process.

20 One attempt to overcome the problem of slower connections was to create a database manager to assist in synchronizing the connection of the interface modules with various ports of the database. However, in order to accommodate numerous web browsers, multiple applications of an interface module may be running, which may complicate the system. With increased use and complication, the system may be difficult 25 to debug when a problem arises. Additionally, because everything runs through a

5 connection manager, there are often miscommunications, synchronization problems, and
bottlenecks between the user applications and the database.

If other databases were static and the data source became inactive or went down
for whatever reason, the data manager would not be able to tell when the data source
became active again. Thus, subsequent queries would still detect an inactive data source.
10 In order to establish another connection with the data source, the whole system would
have to be reinitialized. In situations where the data manager managed multiple users,
this reinitialization would affect remote users whose connection to a data base was
functioning normally.

Thus, it would be an advancement in the art to provide a system and method for
15 connecting a plurality of remote applications with a data source in a simplified way.

It would be a further advancement in the art to provide such a system and method
which would remove the likelihood of bottleneck by removing the necessity of routing
every communication between the interface module and data source through the
connection manager.

20 It would be a further advancement in the art to provide such a system and method
that was dynamic and reliable and did not have to reinitialize if the data source became
inactive or "went down."

Such an apparatus and method in accordance with the present invention is
disclosed and claimed herein.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention solves many or all of the foregoing problems by introducing a system and method by which a plurality of remote applications can connect with a data source without having all communication pass through a simple connection manager.

10 In one aspect of the invention, a system includes an interface module configured to interface with a remote application, a port module to interface between the interface module and the data source, and a connection manager module to facilitate the direct interface between the interface module and the port module. The connection manager may establish a connection between the connection manager and the port module. In one preferred embodiment, the port module reports its availability to the connection manager
15 through this connection. This may be done by the connection manager retrieving a port module identifier, which identifies an available port module for connecting to the data source from a data structure. The port module identifier may then be passed to the interface module so that the interface module may connect directly to the port module, and thus, the data source.

20 The system in one preferred embodiment is configured to support HTML and provide interfacing between the requesting application and the data source. The interface module may be configured to convert the command from the remote application to a structured query language format to support interfacing with the data source.

25 In another aspect of the invention, a method for connecting a plurality of remote applications with a data source includes the steps of providing at least one interface

5 module configured to interface with a remote application, providing at least one port
module to interface between the interface module and the data source, and providing a
connection manager to facilitate the interface between the interface module and the port
module. In a preferred embodiment, the method further includes establishing a direct
connection between the interface module and the port module. A port module identifier
10 for an available port module may be returned to the interface module for direct
connection between the interface module and the port module.

Thus, it is an object of the invention to provide for the management of the
connection between remote applications and a data source which alleviates bottlenecks in
the data flow. It is another object of the invention to simplify the connection process by
15 reducing the steps in the connection process. It is yet another object of the invention to
reduce the need to synchronize each module used in the connection process.

These and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will
become more fully apparent from the following description and appended claims, or may
be learned by the practice of the invention as set forth hereinafter.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other more detailed and specific objects and features of the present
invention are more fully disclosed in the following specification, with reference to the
accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 8 is a flow diagram illustrating steps performed in one embodiment of a method in accordance with the present invention.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Certain preferred embodiments of a system in accordance with the invention are now described with reference to the Figures 1-8, where like reference numbers indicate identical or functionally similar elements. The components of the present invention, as generally described and illustrated in the Figures, may be implemented in a wide variety of configurations. Thus, the following more detailed description of the embodiments of the system and method of the present invention, as represented in the Figures 1-8, is not intended to limit the scope of the invention, as claimed, but is merely representative of presently preferred embodiments of the invention.

Various components of the invention are described herein as “modules.” In various embodiments, the modules may be implemented as software, hardware, firmware, or any combination thereof. For example, as used herein, a module may include any type of computer instruction or computer executable code located within a memory device and/or transmitted as electronic signals over a system bus or network. An identified module may, for instance, comprise one or more physical or logical blocks of computer instructions, which may be organized as an object, procedure, function, or the like.

Nevertheless, the identified modules need not be located together, but may comprise disparate instructions stored in different locations, which together implement the described functionality of the module. Indeed, a module may comprise a single

5 instruction, or many instructions, and may even be distributed over several different code segments, among different programs, and across several memory devices.

As used herein, the term executable code, or merely “executable,” is intended to include any type of computer instruction and computer executable code that may be located within a memory device and/or transmitted as electronic signals over a system bus
10 or network. An identified module of executable code may, for instance, comprise one or more physical or logical blocks of computer instructions which may, for instance, be organized as an object, procedure, or function. Nevertheless, the executables of an identified module need not be located together, but may comprise disparate instructions stored in different locations which together comprise the module and achieve the purpose
15 stated for the module. Indeed, an executable may be a single instruction, or many instructions, and may even be distributed over several different code segments, among different programs, and across several memory devices.

Similarly, operational data may be identified and illustrated herein within modules, and may be embodied in any suitable form and organized within any suitable
20 type of data structure to be used, produced, or operated on during execution of an executable. The operational data may be collected as a single data set, or may be distributed over different locations including over different storage devices, and may at least partially exist merely as electronic signals on a system bus or network.

Figure 1 is a schematic block diagram illustrating a computer system 10 in which
25 a plurality of modules may be hosted on one or more computer workstations 12 connected

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5 network 14 is remote from the workstation 12, the network interface 30 may comprise a
modem, and may connect to the network 14 through a local access line, such as a
telephone line.

Within any given workstation 12, a system bus 32 may operably interconnect the
CPU 16, the memory devices 18, the input devices 26, the output devices 28, the network
10 interface 30, and one or more additional ports 34, such as parallel and serial ports.

The system bus 32 and a network backbone 36 may be regarded as data carriers.
Accordingly, the system bus 32 and the network backbone 36 may be embodied in
numerous configurations, such as wire and/or fiber optic lines, as well as electromagnetic
channels using visible light, infrared, and radio frequencies.

15 In general, the network 14 may comprise a single local area network (LAN), a
wide area network (WAN), several adjoining networks, an Intranet, an Extranet, or, as in
the manner depicted, a system of interconnected networks such as the Internet 40. The
individual workstations 12 may communicate with each other over the backbone 36
and/or over the Internet 40 using various communication techniques.

20 For instance, different communication protocols, e.g., ISO/OSI, IPX, TCP/IP, may
be used within the network 14. In the case of the Internet 40, however, a layered
communications protocol (i.e. TCP/IP) generally best enables communications between
the differing networks 14 and workstations 12.

25 The workstations 12 may be coupled via the network 14 to application servers 42,
and/or other resources or peripherals 44, such as scanners, printers, digital cameras, fax

5 machines, and the like. External networks, may be coupled to the network 14 through a
router 38 and/or through the Internet 40.

Referring now to Figure 2, a data source connection management system 200 of the present invention is shown. In one embodiment, a web browser 202, is part of a computer station 204. The work station 204 may contain a plurality of modules (not shown) containing executable code and operational data suitable for operation within the memory devices 18 of Figure 1. Of course, the memory devices 18 in which the modules of the present invention are located may also be distributed across both local and remote computer workstations 12 (Figure 1). Likewise, two or more illustrated modules may be integrated into a single module without departing from the scope of the invention.

15 The present invention may be used over the Internet 40 in conjunction with a
conventional web browser 202. The web browser 202 interprets HTML documents and
formats and defines web pages 204. The web browser 202 may be at a remote
workstation 12 (Figure 1) and may be connected through the Internet 40 to a web server
206. The web server 206 stores HTML documents and interacts with the web browser
202 for downloading and uploading the documents for generation of web pages 212.

By way of example, a user at a remote application such as a web browser 202, may want to search for a book on a book store web server via the Internet. The web browser 202 connects to the server 206. The server 206 invokes an interface module 208, which allows the remote user to specify a keyword in a book title for example. The interface module 208 will pass the request to a data source 210 and receive data in return

Referring now to Figure 3, the system 200 of the present invention includes a connection manager 220. The connection manager 220 is a module that may include any type of computer instruction or computer executable code located within a memory device and/or transmitted as electronic signals over a system bus or network. It may comprise one or more logical blocks of computer instructions, which may be organized as an object, procedure, function, or the like. In one preferred embodiment, the connection manager 220 is running in the background on the server 206.

The connection manager 220 is also configured to interface with at least one interface module 208. The connection manager is preferably located at a predetermined address to allow the interface module 208 to readily connect to the connection manager 220. Each interface module 208 is also configured to interface with a remote application 202 which may be a web browser connected to the interface module 208 through the Internet 40.

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20 Instead of the connection manager 220 repeatedly having to communicate with each port module 222 and each interface module 208 involved with a data source query for multiple port modules 222 and interface modules 208, the connection manager 220 simply tracks which port modules 222 are busy. When the interface module 208 requests a port module 222 for connection to the data source 210, the connection manager 220 simply provides or identifies a location of an available port module 222 which can then communicate directly with the interface module. It will be appreciated by those of skill in the art that this configuration and method will eliminate information bottlenecks at the connection manager 220.

5 Referring now to Figure 4, a remote application connects to a web server 206 to request information from a data source 210 which in one preferred embodiment is on the server side. For most data sources, the request must be converted into an SQL command. The request is sent to an interface module 208 which reads the request and formats it into an SQL command. Both the web server 206 and the interface module 208 may be
10 resident on the server side. Further, the web server 206 or the interface module 208 may convert the remote application request into an SQL query.

The connection manager 220 then determines an available port module 222 and returns the location of the port module 222 to the interface module 208. The request may then be sent as an SQL command 230 to the data source 210 directly through the port
15 module 222. In one embodiment, the data source 210 may be a database system 210 such as a relational database, but hierarchical and object-oriented databases are also within the scope of this invention. In other preferred embodiments, data sources may include JAVA or PERL applications. In embodiments where data sources other than relational databases are used, the interface module 208 is configured to be compatible with such data sources
20 in a supporting transaction and command language.

A database manager 232, such as DB2 manufactured by International Business Machines, receives the SQL command 230 and searches in the database 210 to retrieve query results 234 that satisfy the SQL command 230. The query results 234 may include any number of various files stored in a database 210 including text, values, characters,
25 integers, and the like. Once the query results 234 are retrieved, the database manager 232

5 passes the query results 234 to the interface module 208 through the appropriate port
module 222 connection. The interface module 208 may pass the query results 234 in an
HTML format through the web server 206 to the remote application, which may be used
to create a web page 212 on a web browser 202. This feature expedites retrieval of query
results 214 and generation of the web page 204.

10 Accordingly, the interface module 208 is configured to be compatible with HTML
as well as SQL transactions and commands 230. In one embodiment, the interface
module 208 may be Net.Data, but one of skill in the art will appreciate that other
computer gateway interfaces capable of supporting and interfacing HTML formats and
SQL commands may be used as well.

15 Referring now to Figures 4, 5, and 6, each port module is known by an associated
database and port module identifier. In one embodiment, a data structure 240 includes
entries 242 containing the name of the data source 210, a minimum number of port
modules 222 associated with the data source 210, and a maximum number of port
modules 222 associated with the data source 210. In one presently preferred
20 embodiment, the data structure is a data source array 240. It will be appreciated by those
of skill in the art that any type of data structure or storage device may be used to store
information of the type stored in the data source array 240.

A second data structure 244 indexes the data source array 240 and includes entries
246 containing data regarding each port module 222 associated with a particular data

5 source 210. Each entry identifies which data source each port module belongs to, the port module identifier, and a status, which states whether the port module is busy or available. In a preferred embodiment, the data structure 244 is a port module array 244. It will be appreciated by those of skill in the art that any type of data structure or storage device may be used to store information of the type store in the port module array 244.

10 The connection manager 220 returns a port module identifier of an available particular port module 222 to the interface module by checking the availability status for the port module 222 associated with the data source 210 that is the object of the data request or SQL command 230. The availability status of a port module 222 may be determined by a number of factors. Upon initialization of the connection manager 220,
15 the minimum number of port modules, as stored in the data source array 240 are launched and available for connecting to an interface module 208.

Once a port module 222 is connected to an interface module 208, that port module 222 is no longer available and its status changes to busy or unavailable. Once a busy port module 222 is no longer occupied by an interface module 208, its status is updated from
20 busy to available and passed along to the connection manager for storage in the port module data structure 244. Each port module 222 may be configured to refresh or restart itself after a predetermined period of time, or after a particular event, such as the occurrence of an error.

In a presently preferred embodiment, each port module 222 is configured to know
25 its availability status and continually report that status to the connection manager 220 for

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5 structures 240, 244 may be part of the connection manager 220, the port module 222, the interface module 208, or may be a separate module, and still provide the necessary information to enable a direct connection 226 between the interface module 208 and the port module 222 after the manner of the present invention.

10 In one preferred embodiment, communication between the interface module 208, connection manager 220, and the port module 222 may be subject to authentication as a security measure. It will be appreciated by those of skill in the art that the data source array 240 and/or the port module array 244 may also include user identification or password data for use in verifying or authenticated the relevant communications. It will further be appreciated that any such identification data may be part of a separate module, 15 or hard coded into the system 200.

Referring now to Figure 7, one preferred embodiment of the present invention includes an arbitrary set of parameters, which may be embodied as a log file 250 associated with the connection manager 220 and each port module 222. Each log file 250 contains data 252 relating to the activity of the port module 222 and connection manager 20 220 to facilitate the tracking of data flow through the system 200. The data 252 in each log file 250 may include, for example, the date, time, a previous SQL statement or request, a present SQL statement or request, a number of rows, a warning message, an error messages, a feature database schema, a number of records, and the like. Because each port module 222 will have a port module identifier and data source identifier, a user 25 may track the how many, and what type of, SQL statements passed to the data source 210.

5 One may also determine the time of the last SQL statement or request to the data source
210 and other information at predetermined points in the process.

It will be appreciated by those of skill in the art that this information would
facilitate debugging the system 200. For example, users at a remote application 202 that
may be creating or programming a web page that utilizes data stored at a data source 210
10 may check the log files 250 to track down an error in the application.

Each port module 222 and the connection manager 210 writes to a log file 250,
which in one preferred embodiment is stored as a flat file. In a presently preferred
embodiment, the log file 250 has a maximum storage capacity of one megabyte. Once the
log file 250 is full, another log file 250 may be generated. The log file 250 in accordance
15 with the present invention is dynamic. The data 252 stored in the log files 250 is
continually updated as the system 200 operates. It will be appreciated by those of skill in
the art that various sizes or types of files can be used to store the data 252 contained in the
log files 250. Of importance is the fact that the data 252 in the log files 250 is accessible
to the remote application 202.

20 The log file 250 is configured such that a user at a remote location 202 can view
the data 252 stored in the log files 250 on a screen, print out the data 252, or send it to
another application. The user of a remote application 202 may also determine which of
predetermined types of data will be stored in the log files 250. The user may set the log
files 250 at a maximum level so that a maximum amount of data is stored in the log files
25 250. The user may also set the log files 250 to store a minimum level of data. It will be

5 appreciated by those of skill in the art that the system 200 will run more efficiently when the amount of data 252 stored in the log file 250 is set to a minimal level.

In one preferred embodiment, the log file 250 stores a change in status of the data source 210 from active to inactive. Thus, the port module 222 knows whether the data source 210 was "down" the last time the port module 222 was connected to the interface
10 module 208. When the connection manager 220 seeks to establish a connection with the data source 210 through the port module 222, the port module 222 will check the last status of the data source 210, to which it is assigned to determine whether the data source 210 was active or inactive. If the last detected status indicated that the data source was inactive or "down," the port module 222 will reestablish a connection with the data
15 source 210.

The connection or reconnection between the port module 222 and the data source 210 may be transparent to the interface module 208. If the data source 210 is down, then the port module 222 will send the interface module 208 an error message stating that the data source 210 is down. When the data source 210 becomes active or is otherwise
20 accessible again, the entire system 200 does not have to stop and restart in order to reestablish a connection between the interface module 208 and the data source 210. The port module 222, because it knows that the data source 210 was down during its last connection, will reestablish a connection with the data source.

One of skill in the art will appreciate that if the connection manager 220 had to
25 reinitialize, all of the part modules 222 attached to the connection manager 220, even

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5 unavailability of the data source 210. In one preferred embodiment, the unavailability of the data source 210 is detected by the port module 222. In another preferred embodiment, the unavailability of the data source 210 is detected by the connection manager 220. An error message is returned to the interface module 208. A subsequent availability of the data source 210 may then be detected 314 by the port module 222. In one preferred
10 embodiment, the subsequent availability of the data source 210 is detected by the connection manager. The port module 222 is reconnected to the data source 210 through the port module 222, without having to initialize the connection manager 220.

In one preferred embodiment, the connections between the interface module 208, the connection manager 220, and the port module 222 are authorized to facilitate secured
15 communications.

The method may then be repeated 310 for additional data source requests or queries. If there are no further requests, the remote application 202 disconnects from the server 206 and the method terminates 320.

The invention provides for the management of the connection between remote
20 applications and a data source which alleviates bottlenecks in the data flow. The system and method of the present invention simplifies the connection between the remote application and the data source process by reducing the steps in the connection process. The system and method of the present invention eliminates the need to continually synchronize the interface module 208 with the port module 222 for each data source 210
25 request. The invention may be readily adapted to existing software applications such as

5 web browsers, web servers, database management systems, operating systems and other modules disclosed herein.

The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its scope or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the
10 invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

What is claimed and desired to be secured by United States Letters Patent is: